

ISSN: 2347-3428

# Dharmadoot

Published since 1935

# धर्मदूत



Mulagandha Kuti Vihara (1931-2021)



2565 B.E.

Vol. 87

November 2021

**MAHA BODHI SOCIETY OF INDIA**

(Anagarika Dharmapala International Institute of Pali & Buddhist Studies)

Sarnath, Varanasi (U.P.) India

# Concept of Yoga: Vedic and Buddhist Perspectives

C. Upender Rao

Professor of Sanskrit and Pali, School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067

The term *Yoga* is formed from the root *Yuj* which stands for “yoking” or “being yoked” (*Yuj=Yoge*), and thus, this word can mean the “applications,” in the sense of endeavoring, or “bondage.” To ‘yoke’ oneself to the wholesome qualities and actions is essential for progress on the path of Dharma. But to be ‘yoked’ to something unwholesome is to fall prey to the influence of attachment and craving. Hence the *akusala* or unwholesome actions should at all costs be avoided.

In India, Yoga had been an admirable form of application through the ages. In the Vedic period, the term yoga was used for *yoking, join or tie together*. This meaning in the course of the period began to imply fixing the mind upon an object. In a passage in the Kaṭha-Upanishad, *Yoga* stands for control of the senses and the calming of the mind, and the same meaning continued in Buddhist literature also.

Yogic methods and practices were given importance in Buddhism. Buddha’s guidance to perform the four Smṛtiprasthānas and four Brahma-Vihāras (*maitrī, karuṇā, muditā, upekṣā*) and many other teachings are essential to gain the yogic powers. The Aṣṭāṅga-yoga taught by sage Patañjali and noble eightfold path (Ārya- Aṣṭāṅga-mārga) propounded by Bhagawan Buddha bear the similarity. Dhammapada says,

*hitvā mānusakaṃ yogam dibbam yogam upaccagā  
sabba-yoga-visamyuttaṃ tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ*<sup>1</sup>

(Having abandoned human bondage and gone beyond celestial bondage, released from all kinds of bondages, such a one I call a Brāhmin). Here the word *Yoga* was used in the sense of union or bondage.

In the early discourses of Buddha, the term ‘yoga’ was used in two principal categories, where Yoga either assumed a positive sense or

<sup>1</sup>Dhammapada verse-417 p. 192

a negative sense. The positive meaning of Yoga is an application for something, and the negative connotation is that it has been undertaken as a kind of bondage that needs to be released. These two senses express a regular pattern in the teachings of Buddha.

In Bhagavadgītā, it is mentioned— the Kṛṣṇa himself was a great Yogin and Bhagavadgītā was sung by him is ‘Yoga-śāstra.’ In the Fourth Chapter of the Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says,

*imaṁ vivasvate yogaṁ proktavānaḥamavyayam  
vivasvānmanave prāha manurikṣvākave ’bravīt  
evaṁ paramparā-prāptam imaṁ rājarṣayo viduḥ  
sa kālēneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapa  
sa evāyaṁ mayā te ’dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ  
bhakto ’si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṁ hyetaduttamam<sup>2</sup>*

Here Kṛṣṇa informed Arjuna that this science of Yoga was initially given to the Sun and the Sun explained it to Manu. Manu explained it to Ikṣvāku, thus by disciples’ succession, this yogic science has been coming down from times immemorial. But over time, it was lost. Kṛṣṇa used the word Yoga many times in the Bhagavadgītā. He advocates for actions being fully established in Yoga (*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*) because Yoga means equanimity (*śamatvam*).

*Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi Saṁgaṁ tyaktvā dhanāñjaya,  
Sīdhyaśīdhyossamo bhūtvā Śamatvaṁ yoga ucyate<sup>3</sup>*

There are four main paths of Yoga - Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Rāja Yoga, and Jñāna Yoga. But in Bhagavadgītā, three kinds of Yoga-s are mentioned. Karma-yoga or the Path of Action Bhakti-yoga or the Path of Devotion to Íśvara, Jñāna-yoga, or the Path of Knowledge. Besides, in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Bhagavadgītā, ‘Rājavidyā’ was also explained. Thus the Yoga was described in Bhagavadgītā in various ways<sup>4</sup>.

Those who study Yoga may find so much similarity between the

<sup>2</sup>Bhagavadgītā, 4.1–3 p. 63,64

<sup>3</sup>Bhagavadgītā, 2.48 p. 43

<sup>4</sup>śamatvaṁ yoga ucyate — Bg 2.48 p. 43

yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā — Bg 6.17 p. 89

yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapa — Bg 4.2 p.64

yogo ’nirviṇṇa-cetasā — Bg 6.24 p. 91

Vedic and Buddhist perspectives of Yoga. We can see a strong yogic influence on Buddhism. This similarity between Vedic and Buddhist thoughts is quite natural, as Buddha was born in India, a follower of a Vedic tradition. It was after Buddha had passed away Buddhism arose as a religion. We can find the accounts of a Shiva-Buddha teaching that existed in Indonesia in medieval times. All Hindus even today accept Buddha as a great teacher, even if they do not follow Buddhism as a religion. However, we can say in another way; Yoga is neither Vedic nor Buddhist. It began as an independent, very ancient Indian thought and tradition which gained universal acceptability.

Sage Patañjali established the Yoga system in his Yoga Sutras. Yet, he has not been regarded as the founder of the Yoga tradition. He had compiled the yogic teachings that existed long before him. Reflecting on the older practice of Yoga, sage Patañjali impeccably explained Yoga in his *Yogadarśana*. Sage Patañjali explained an eightfold (*aṣṭāṅga*) yoga, emphasizing an integral spiritual development including the ethical disciplines (Yama and Niyama), postures (*Āsana*), breathing exercises (*Prāṇāyāma*), control of the senses (*Pratyāhāra*), concentration (*Dhāraṇā*), meditation (*Dhyāna*) and absorption (*Samādhi*).

Yogic tradition should be traced back to the oldest Indian text, Rig Veda, which speaks about yoking our mind with the supreme soul. Sage Vasiṣṭha and Yājñavalkya were the early teachers of Yoga. In Bhagavadgītā, it is mentioned that Lord Kṛṣṇa himself was a great Yogin and Bhagavadgītā sung by him is a Yoga-śāstra. Yoga is a Sanskrit term that refers to both the union of the self with the Absolute. The vast array of techniques for achieving it embraces all the tremendous Indian-born spiritual systems, including Buddha-dharma. But the Buddhist masters cautioned that haṭha-yoga's influence on physical practices is a bad fascination with the body. Because the body is impermanent and destined to decay, according to Buddhism. Therefore one must overcome the taṇhā (caving), including the body. Consciousness, if one wants to achieve Yoga.

The *Yogadarśna* mainly concentrates on the mind and its control because the supreme liberation or kaivalya can be obtained only through the help of the mind. Sage Patañjali, therefore, begins his treatise with

a yoga sūtra “*Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ*.”<sup>5</sup> The *cittavṛttinirodhaḥ* here refers to calming the mind through meditative techniques. By relaxing these mental fluctuations, the yogi opens him or herself to experience his form and later feels union with the Absolute Reality. The central teachings of Buddha are based on this very proclamation. Buddha speaks in a better way than the other yoga masters of ancient India, He says-

Manōpubbangamā dhammā manōsetthā manōmayā  
manasācē padutthēna bhāsati vākaroti vā  
tatōnam dukkhamanvēti cakkam vavahatō padam.

Manō pubbangamā dhammā manō setthā manōmayā  
manasā cē pasannēna bhāsati vā karoti vā  
tatō nam sukhamanvēti chāyāva anapāyani.<sup>6</sup>

(All phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they all are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with an evil mind, then the suffering will follow just as the wheels of a cart follow the footsteps of the bull, which is pulling the cart. And all phenomena have the mind as their forerunner; they all are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a purified mind, happiness follows one like one’s own shadow.)

Buddha continues to express a more sharp teaching of the mind in *Cittavaggo* of Dhammapada. He says it is difficult to guard, difficult to control the flickering, fickle mind. A wise person straightens it as a fletcher straightens an arrow. Like a fish drawn from its watery abode and thrown upon land, even so, does this mind flutter. Hence the realm of the passions have to be avoided. The mind is hard to restrain, swift; it flies wherever it likes. We have to control it. A controlled thought is conducive to happiness. The mind is tough to perceive, extremely subtle, flits wherever it lists. Let the wise person guard it; a guarded mind is conducive to happiness.

Faring far, wandering alone, bodiless, lying in a cave, is the mind. Those who subdue it are freed from the bond of Māra. He whose mind is not steadfast, he who knows not the true doctrine, he whose confidence wavers the wisdom, of such a one will never be perfect. He whose mind

<sup>5</sup>SāṅkyaYogadarśana, (Ed. By Goswāmi Dāmodar Shastri) 1.2 p. 11

(The word *chitta*, meaning “consciousness” or thought; *vṛtti*, means “fluctuations”, and *nirodha*, means “suppression” or “restraint.”), Vidyā Vilas Press, Benares city, 1935

<sup>6</sup>Dhammapada, Yamakavaggo, 1,2 p. 1

is not soaked (by lust), he, who is not affected (by hatred), he who has transcended both good and evil — for such a vigilant one, there is no fear. Realizing this body is (as fragile) as a jar, establishing this mind (as firm) as a (fortified) city, he should attack Māra with the weapon of wisdom. He should guard his conquest and be without attachment. Before long, alas! This body will lie upon the ground, cast aside, devoid of consciousness, like a useless charred log. Whatever (harm) a foe may do to to his opponent, or a hater to a hater, An ill-directed mind can do one far greater (damage). Neither mother, father, nor any other relative can do what a well-directed sense does and thereby elevates one. Therefore it is apparent that Buddha's teachings are full of yogic perspectives.

### **Yogācāra**

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the second great school after Śūnya-vāda was the 'Yogācāra' and this serves as evidence of the fact that how Yoga was given importance in Buddhism. 'Yogācāra' is a Sanskrit term. Ācāra means the practice, and the Yogācāra means "Practice of Yoga". This refers to the practical yogic side of the second great school of Mahāyāna. It is also known as Vijñāna-vāda, "Consciousness School" or Citta-mātra-vāda, (*cittamātra* or *vijñapti-mātra*). *Vijñapti-mātra* means "Mind-Only School." The Yogācāra school, which arose in the early centuries of the common era, does not acknowledge the reality of independent consciousness.

Through Yoga finally transforming the store-consciousness (*ālaya-parāvṛti*), a truth seeker (*yogin*) can become enlightened. The illusory distinction between subject and object is eliminated when the final emancipation is realized. There are many places in the Pali-Nikāyas or Āgamas of early Buddhist literature that being indicative of later Yogācāra thought. These teachings of Buddha could have inspired the Vijñānavādins to develop their philosophy. Apart from the nikāya and āgama texts, which deal with the Śūnyatā and madhyamā-pratipad, the *Prajñā-pāramitā* discourse forms the root of Mādhyamaka School. This school was founded by Ācārya Nāgārjuna (2<sup>nd</sup> A. C.). However, Ācārya Asaṅga, the founder of Vijñānavāda (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>-century A.C.), and Vasubandhu, the second great Ācārya of the Mind-Only School have given the importance to Yoga.

A verse in the *Theragāthā* brings out the positive connotations of

the term Yoga in early Buddhism, recommending that one should apply oneself to tranquillity and insight at the proper time<sup>7</sup>. Yoga will lead to wisdom, “*yogā ve jāyati bhūri*” whereas lack of application will result in the loss of understanding, “*ayogā bhūri saṅkhayo*.”<sup>8</sup> The term yoga occurs not only for monks’ meditation; but also for the monks who apply themselves predominantly to the sādhanā of Dharma (*dharma yoga*). Yoga can even stand for a type of teaching or practice. This type of usage occurs in descriptions of how someone, due to following a different kind of teaching, *aññatra-yoga*, will be unable to understand the deeper aspects of the Dhamma (Majjhima Nikaya vol. I, 487).

A repeated expression in the Pali discourses is “*Yogo karaṇīyo*,” which conveys that something should be done or undertaken. A monk living in the forest should apply himself to the teaching and the discipline of higher stages of meditation (Majjhima Nikaya vol. I, 472) which is nothing but Yoga. Other occasions for such application are developing insight into the links of dependent origination or the four noble truths, ‘*idam dukkhan’ti yogo karaṇīyo*.’ When one lacks tranquillity of the mind, ‘*Ceto-Samathā*,’ or deeper insight and higher wisdom, *adhipaññā-dhamma-vipassanā*, one should apply to develop the yogic quality. Once one possesses both, the time has come to apply oneself to teaching the final goal, “*āsavānaṃ khayāya yogo karaṇīyo*.”

A maxim that involves both positive and negative gradations of Yoga can be found in the Dhammapada. “*Those who apply themselves to what one should not apply to, and who do not apply themselves to what one should apply to, thereby lose their welfare.*”

### **Yoga as a bondage**

As it was already explained, the term yoga was used in a negative sense too in Buddhism; now, let us see how it was used in a negative connotation. Buddhism speaks to avoid the four types of bondages (yogas), which we can find in Pali discourses.

The bondage of sensuality, *kāmayoga*  
the bondage of existence, *bhavayoga*  
the bondage of views, *Diṭṭhiyoga*  
the bondage of ignorance, *avijjā-yoga*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Theragāthā verse 584 p. 72

<sup>8</sup>Dhammapada verse-282, p. 146

<sup>9</sup>Dīgha Nikāya III, 230, p.179



These are the forms of bondage. They bind beings to the evil and unwholesome things and thereby result in future dukkha. Hence these four types of Yoga lead downwards, *hāna-bhāgīya*.<sup>10</sup> The state of bondage in these four cases is not realizing the impermanent nature and disadvantage of sensual pleasures. Also, not recognizing the forms of existence, views, and the six types of contact, one falls prey to craving and attachment.

In addition to these four types of Yoga, another perspective on Yoga as a reprehensible form of bondage is based on a two-fold distinction between bondage to the human world, *mānusaka yoga*, and bondage to the celestial worlds, *dibba yoga*. Both will be left behind with non-return. Yet another type of Yoga is the bondage of craving, *taṇhā Yoga*. This Yoga comprises a craving for sensuality, existence, and nonexistence and will be overcome with full awakening.

The term *Yogakkhema* was used in both Vedic and Buddhist traditions. *Yogakkhema* means liberation from all bondages. In the Ṛgveda ‘*yogakṣema*’ means the security or safe possession of what has been acquired the safekeeping of property, welfare, prosperity substance and livelihood.” In the early Buddhist literature, the idea of welfare was then applied to Nibbāna. An example of this usage is a Dhammapada verse, which identifies Nibbāna as the ultimate freedom from bondage, *anuttara yogakkhema*,<sup>11</sup> which at the same time is supreme peace, Parama sānti. The exact implications also underlie the formulation of the Buddha’s pre-awakening quest for liberation, which was his noble quest for *anuttara yogakkhema*.

While Māra is *ayoga-khema-kara*, who wishes living beings to remain in bondage, Buddha desires their liberation, *yoga-khema-kama*, an aspiration he already had in previous lives. The Buddha’s untrained disciples and his monastic disciples progressed towards this goal by supporting each other. Supreme freedom from bondage is possible through any of the five spheres of liberation. That is, a breakthrough to *anuttara yogakkhema* can happen when one listens to the teachings on them during meditation practice.

The four *Satipaṭṭhānas* (*Smṛti-prasthānas*) in particular are what leads a disciple in higher training to *anuttara yogakkhema* out of which the practice of mindfulness of breathing is predominantly singled out

<sup>10</sup>Ibid III, 276, p. 240

<sup>11</sup>Dhammapada verse-23 p.12



for the same purpose. A whole range of meditation practices that can lead to incredible freedom from bondage, *mahatā yogakkhemā*, can be found in the *Bhojjanga Samyutta* (Samyutta Nikāya V, 131). Hence teaching on detachment regarding the objects of the senses is a *yoga-kkhema-pariyaya* an exposition on freedom from bondage.

He who has reached the final goal is ultimately free from bondage. This kind of person is called in Pali '*accanta-yogakkhemī*'. They have deep regard towards the Tathāgata and his teachings, aware of the benefit they have attained through '*anuttara yogakkhema*.' Several contemporary books explore the synthesis of Buddhism and Yoga. The most philosophically comprehensive is Frank Jude Boccio's "Mindfulness Yoga: The Awakened Union of Breath, Body, and Mind." Dr. Radhakrishnan discussed the subject in his book "The Principle Upaniṣads," published in New York. Werner's book "Yoga and Indian Philosophy," published in Delhi, is also essential. Norman's work of Collected Papers "Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism," published from Oxford, is another critical book for this field. We can find several *yoga-mudras* in Buddhist scriptures, which are the gestures of yogic powers, which Bhagawan Buddha and other Bodhisattvas have used for the people's happiness. Thus the teachings of Buddha are full of Yogic perception. Buddha enjoyed Yoga, and most essentially, He practiced Yoga in his life. Therefore it forms our moral duty to follow our ancient acāryas and practice Yoga in our life. Practicing Yoga is more important than arguing whether Buddha followed the Vedic system or ancient Yoga masters like sage Patañjali followed the Buddha.

*Sabbe hontu nirāmayā*

## Bibliography

1. Apte, V. S. *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, compiled by Motilal Banarsidass private ltd. Delhi, 2007
2. Bapat, P. V. *2500 Years of Buddhism*. Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information, 1956.
3. Dasgupta, S. N. *History of Indian Philosophy (Vol. 1)*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.
4. Dhammapada, (Ed. Kanchhedilal Gupta), Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan, Varanasi, third edition 1983
5. Dhammananda, K. *The Dhammapada*. Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998.

6. Eliot, Charles, *Hinduism, and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1921
7. Max Müller F. The sacred books of the East (translated by various scholars) (Edited) (part I Dhammapada, Part II Suttanipāta) Vol 10, Motilal Banarsidass Private Ltd. Delhi 2004
8. Ṛgveda with commentaries of skandasvāmin, Udgītha, Veṅkaṭamādhava and Mudgala (Part V-VII), Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, 1964
9. Radhakrishnan, S. *History of Indian Philosophy (Vol. 1)*. London, 1929.
10. The Bhagavad Gītā or The Song Divine, (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation) Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 273005, 47<sup>th</sup> reprint, 2012
11. शास्त्री, द्वारिकादास, धम्मपदपालि), सं. व अनु. बौद्धभारती, वाराणसी, 2002.
12. शास्त्री, द्वारिकादास, सुत्तनिपातपालि), सं. व अनु., बौद्धभारती, वाराणसी, 2005.
13. दीघनिकायपालि, धम्मगिरि-पालि-ग्रंथमाला, विपश्यना विशोधन विन्यास, इगतपुरी, प्रथम आवृत्ति, 1998
14. मज्झिमनिकायपालि, धम्मगिरि-पालि-ग्रंथमाला, विपश्यना विशोधन विन्यास, इगतपुरी, प्रथम आवृत्ति, 1998.
15. संयुत्तनिकायपालि, (खण्ड), शास्त्री, द्वारिकादास) सं. व. अनु. बौद्धभारती, वाराणसी.